

Bell Wants to See James Earl Ray

By LAWRENCE M. O'ROURKE
and L. STUART DITZEN

Bulletin Washington Bureau

Washington — Attorney General Griffin Bell says he'd like to speak personally with James Earl Ray about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I'm puzzled over the case," Bell said yesterday. "I might think about consideration (of a reduced prison term) if he told the truth."

Ray is now serving a 99-year sentence in a state prison in Tennessee for King's murder.

Bell said there never has been an explanation of where Ray obtained money for living and travel expenses in the months before and after the assassination.

"I'd like to talk with Ray to find out about where he got his money," Bell said at a breakfast meeting with reporters. "... I would want to meet with Ray myself or send someone in whom I had complete confidence to size up people and see if he (Ray) was telling the truth."

Bell noted that Ray's prison term is in the jurisdiction of the Tennessee state government, not the Federal Government, but he observed: "I could speak to officials of Tennessee about it."

Bell's remarks came less than a week after the Justice Department released a report saying no evidence has been developed since King's killing in 1968 to indicate that Ray was part of a conspiracy.

But the department also found that the FBI failed to investigate thoroughly the source of Ray's finances.

The report said: "... A good deal of mystery still surrounds James Ray and the assassination, particularly the means by which he financed his lifestyle and travels ... "

The House Select Committee on Assassinations has begun a new investigation into the King killing, but the committee is bogged down in a power struggle between its chairman, Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex), and its chief counsel, Richard A. Sprague of Philadelphia. The committee also wants to talk with Ray.

The source of Ray's finances is significant because he was a fugitive both before and after the assassination—with no apparent source of income.

Yet he traveled extensively in the United States, Canada, Mexico and overseas.



Griffin Bell

"I'm puzzled..."

bills and to pick up his meal and bar tabs.

Ray has been trying to change his guilty plea in the King case almost from the day he entered it.

From jail, Ray told writer William Bradford Huie that his money was supplied by a mysterious criminal associate whom Ray knew only by the name "Raoul."

But no one ever has succeeded in locating or identifying Raoul, and Ray has damaged the credibility of his story by telling several versions of his activities on the day King was killed.